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## ATG Interviews Dave Williams

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## Managing Director, Bernan

by **Katina Strauch** (Editor, *Against the Grain*, MSC 98, The Citadel, SC 29409; Phone & Fax: 843-723-3536) <kstrauch@comcast.net>

**ATG:** Can you tell us when you arrived at Bernan, and a little about the experience you bring to the Managing Director role there?

**DW:** I came to Bernan in the beginning of September, but — and I mean this in only the best of ways — I feel like I've been here a long time. That's because Bernan is a mix of both government publication distribution and professional publishing, and I have spent a good number of years associated with both.

I started with Harper & Row in the 70's in medical publishing, then with Aspen Publishing in the early 80's in healthcare management, and finally in the later 80's and 90's at Government Institutes, where we provided legal/regulatory compliance information for the business, college, and library markets. This included authored books, subscriptions — print and electronic — self-study and live training courses, as well as distribution of government regulations and federal agency industry guidebooks.

During those years — and you do start to feel your age when you describe your career in "decades" — I've held a wide range of editorial, marketing, manufacturing, publisher, and operations management positions, so I'm comfortable with the various aspects of the Bernan business (although the underlying technologies have certainly changed throughout those years).

Most recently, I was Vice President & General Manager of Government Institutes, which had become the publishing and training division of a large consulting engineering firm.

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terprise. They deserve a hearing and a voice in our library decisions — especially in regard to journals in their discipline.

All of these arguments suggest that the better collection development policy regarding old journal runs may be the more cautious one. I realize, declining shelf space may force one to discard. I don't blame anyone for taking that step when there seems no other alternative. But if you have the room, if you are not willing to cast all caution to the wind, and if you don't believe rigorous efficiency is always the way to go, consider keeping your old journal runs of JSTOR and Project Muse. Prudence, sensitivity to our patrons, and a measured skepticism about the future argue that it makes good sense. Discarding quality bound journals should always be a last resort.

#### Endnotes

1. Kevin M. Guthrie, "Lessons from JSTOR: User Behavior and Faculty Attitudes," *Journal of Library Administration*, 36, no. 3, 118.

**ATG:** Looking at the "state-of-Bernan" as it exists today, aren't the majority of your publications government-document based?

**DW:** Yes, that is the case, especially on the Bernan Distribution side, and also true to some extent for Bernan Press, our publishing imprint, although here the typical approach is to add proprietary analysis and expertly compile and organize the government information that is used.

**ATG:** Then with most government documents now available online, what are Bernan's plans as a publisher and distributor moving forward?

**DW:** Well, for one thing, I think the move to electronic dissemination of information may be inexorable, but it is also evolutionary, and the need for print versions will stay around for a long time.

Another consideration is open-ended potential to add value to government documents by aggregating the tremendous amount of information out there, providing a user focus to it, and then adding to it other information such as expert analysis.

Additionally, the growing accessibility of government data online reminds me of a comment I heard a CFO make in the mid1980's when spreadsheets first came out: "The problem now is that everyone thinks he or she is a financial analyst."

In that vein, the increasing ease in accessing government regulations doesn't make you an attorney any more than the ability to access government statistics makes you a statistician. In short, at times there can be almost too much information, too loosely organized, available.

**ATG:** What about the statistical data published through Bernan Press — do you have plans to "mine" that data and make it available online?

**DW:** Absolutely, and the "who, what, when, where, and how" of this is actually one of the key points of our current strategic discussions.

**ATG:** Given the particular experience you bring to the table, what changes can we expect to see coming out of Bernan?

**DW:** The short-term answer is a qualified "None." There should be little change to the core Bernan business, because it is a solid business of service to the library community built on a long-standing "customer first" relationship — and while you always strive to improve, there's no substitute for keeping your eye on your customers' changing needs.

However, what I do hope to bring to Bernan are things that will be additive in nature.

Bernan Distribution will continue to emphasize its comprehensiveness in providing libraries "one-stop shopping" access to over 45,000 U.S. government and intergovernmental

titles, and I certainly encourage the expansion already underway to bring this same level of comprehensive distribution to electronic information services.

We are also working to improve the ease with which customers can place orders, access current and forthcoming title information, and communicate so as to get quick answers to questions and resolutions to problems.

Bernan Press already has a wonderful and growing collection of statistical references in publication, although we're more than just Data Books.

We have a new title that we co-published with the Library of Congress, the *Encyclopedia of the Library of Congress*, which will be a wonderful addition to any library. We have co-published important titles with other government agencies in addition to numerous titles with the World Trade Organization, and we'd like to continue to expand our activities in this role.

Where I hope my personal experience will come into play is in helping us build an even wider range of authored and compiled publications and reference works that will have appeal not only to the traditional Bernan library market, but also to corporations and government agencies.

**ATG:** I understand Bernan Press has a title on the CHOICE "Outstanding Academic Books of 2004 list coming out in January. What is that title?

**DW:** "The Almanac of American Education" has been selected for inclusion in CHOICE's annual "Outstanding Academic Titles" list. That's a real source of pride and a tribute not only to our in-house publishing staff, but also to our outside Editors involved with these works, and I think it is this kind of recognition that will encourage more federal agencies and intergovernmental organizations to work with us in co-publishing ventures.

**ATG:** What do you see as the key to future products and services that Bernan will provide, and thereby the key to Bernan's future success?

**DW:** That's always a dangerous question because it requires a broad answer, and in answering broadly you can sometimes miss something "right in front of your face," as they say, simply because you live and breathe it every day. I also want to be careful that ideas and concepts aren't interpreted as promises!

With that caveat, I think the keys to future success boil down to five things for us:

1. Always begin by listening to your customer's needs. This sounds simple, but it's easy to lose sight of it, given the exigencies of the day.

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2. **Be a part of the inexorable move to electronic information delivery**, but in doing so, don't forget what got you here. I've witnessed, first-hand, how easy it is to get caught up in the glitz and glamour of what you can *technically* do — regardless of whether your customer actually *needs* you to do it!

As alluded to earlier, many of our customers appreciate the fact that **Bernan** provides print editions of government publications that are otherwise issued only in electronic form, and in some cases we have continued to publish valued data compilations that have been discontinued altogether by the government. We are also now a distributor for online products from intergovernmental organizations such as the UN, OECD, World Bank, World Tourism Organization, and the Pan American Health Organization. And our free monthly *Government Publication News* electronic newsletter is very popular.

3. **Partnerships**. The ever-changing economy, pace of technological change, increasing globalization, and the depth of expertise and extent of outreach required in today's business climate make the development of key partnerships an integral part of today's business operation. This includes strategic partners in building new products, new subject areas, and

new customer markets, as well as partners in reaching and delivering these new products and services to the market.

4. **Resources**. Perhaps the best part of coming to **Bernan** is the strong and experienced core management team already in place. **Libby Bauer**, our Director of Distribution, **Tamera Wells-Lee**, our Director of Publishing, **Bruce Samuelson**, our Director of Marketing & Library Services, and **Sharon Keyser**, our Chief Financial Officer, all have many years of experience at **Bernan** and within the industry.

Also, our experienced Customer Service and Acquisitions staffs have established long-standing relationships with customers and agencies so they understand the unique needs and nuances that are critical to providing excellent service on both ends of our business. An important part of my job will be to help with strategic direction, resources and support where I can — and to know enough to stand out of the way where I should!

And last, but not least,

5. **Always end with your customer**, specifically listening to how well you've delivered on meeting those needs you've hopefully listened to in the first place!

And in that regard, I've enjoyed spending a portion of my time in these early months talking to our library customers about some new product ideas, and I look forward even more to being a part of the many library conferences at which

**Bernan** exhibits. Whether it's at ALA, SLA, or AALL, I hope your readers will stop by to introduce themselves and share their feedback and ideas. And they don't have to wait for a conference; I can always be contacted via email at <dwilliams@bernan.com>.


**ATG:** *It's nice to see Bernan's continuing and strong commitment to customer service. And last, but not least, while I'm sure working at Bernan is fun, what do you do for fun outside of Bernan?*

**DW:** I suppose the normal range of things. A little less of the tennis and skiing we've always done a lot of, now that our kids are out on their own (our son lives in Manhattan, our daughter in D.C.). But I still golf (badly), love going to the theatre — especially Broadway on our trips up to New York, and the **Shakespeare Theatre** here in D.C., and then travel whenever we can fit it in.

And like many of us in this field, I like to write — hopefully maybe just a bit better than I golf, but I suspect not!

**ATG:** *And with a career in publishing, what do you read?*

**DW:** While I never have enough time to read as much as I'd like, when I do, it's a really eclectic range — most recently the *History of the Blues* (my "beach read"), quite a few of **Edward Abbey's** works, an anthology of writings from *The New Yorker*, and currently *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*.

Additionally, my wife is in charge of Reading and the Secondary English Curriculum for our county's public schools, so I'm constantly being handed myriad poems, short stories and essays to read — which I promptly do. You never know when there might be a test. 

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## ATG Interviews Bob Schatz

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### Coutts Library Services

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by **Jack Montgomery** (Western Kentucky University) <jack.montgomery@wku.edu>

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**ATG:** *Bob, you're not a new face to most of our readership. Could you take a moment to tell us how you've come to be with Coutts? What is your new title?*

**BS:** Thanks for asking. After events at **Franklin Book** went down, I was fortunate enough to have several companies express interest in acquiring my services. Frankly, at that time, I didn't think of **Coutts** as my primary interest. As I had discussions with key managers within **Coutts**, including **Andy Alferovs**, **Stephen Wilson**, Managing Director of **Coutts**, and **James Gray**, the company's CEO, I became more intrigued and more interested. After visiting **Coutts' North American** headquarters, I became convinced that this represented a great place for me to continue my career. At that point, I accepted their offer to become Director of New Business Development for the U.S., and I have no regrets about that decision.

**ATG:** *Can you tell us a little bit about the company's history and its overall philosophy?*

**BS:** To my way of thinking, there are really two **Coutts**: the **Coutts** of the past and the **Coutts** of the present. The company has been around since the demise of the **Abel** empire, some thirty years ago. **Coutts** at that time built a solid reputation as an approval vendor of some repute. The company faced some challenges, though, and lost ground in the U.S. market at least, to other organizations. Five years ago, **BMBC**, a UK-based wholesaler of medical and business books, acquired ownership of **Coutts**, and this began the rebuilding of **Coutts** into a truly comprehensive, international book supplier. We now see ourselves as rightfully joining **Blackwells** and **Yankee Book Peddler** as one of only three truly comprehensive academic book suppliers in North America, and in other parts of the world for that matter. **Coutts Li-**

**brary Supply**, the largest division of **Coutts Information Services**, now represents offices in North America (US and Canada), the UK (England, and **Farries**, a public library supplier in Scotland), and in Holland, from which we provide firm orders, approvals, and standing orders to libraries in 130 different countries.

The philosophy is fairly straight-forward: offer true choice and true competition by providing a full array of services, delivered well.

**ATG:** *Coutts seems to be changing, from hints we've seen in the press and heard at conferences. Can you tell us what's going on? Is the company changing its focus?*

**BS:** We certainly have changed, from a company that thinks of itself as a regional niche player, to a global organization, fully invested in competing in all arenas in all services related to the supply of books to libraries. And, we've

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